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Movies and TV to Get Content Rating System

By Alexander Bratersky

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A media rating system will be launched to define content suitable for children, but journalistic publications will be exempt, calming fears that the new rules are targeting media freedoms — but not dispelling them altogether.

A bill signed by President Dmitry Medvedev on Jan. 3 requires television broadcasters, publishers and filmmakers to rate their products for the age groups of 6, 12 or 16 based on whether they contain pornography, profanity or graphic violence, or might prompt children to risk their well-being.

Films and shows broadcast on television should be preceded by a warning sign covering at least 5 percent of the screen, and public screenings should begin with a verbal announcement of the age rating. Print publications not suitable for minors will be sold in sealed packages.

The bill does not cover web content — the source of information and entertainment for an

ever-growing number of Russian teenagers — but instead says online regulation should remain the responsibility of Internet service providers.

Live television broadcasts and political and news media are also exempt from the legislation.

Grading will be done by child experts working for a yet-unidentified state body. The bill, which has equivalents in most countries worldwide, will come into force in 2012.

“The law is aimed toward the good will of law-abiding producers,” Nina Ostanina, a member of the State Duma's Family, Women and Children Committee who worked on the legislation, said by telephone Monday.

But Ostanina, a deputy with the Communist Party, said the bill became “too liberal” after being tampered with by United Russia lawmakers.

The bill introduces relatively small fines for offenders and does not contain heavier punishments such as the removal of licenses.

“What sort of a fine is 50,000 rubles [$1,600] for a channel like Channel One?” Ostanina said, referring to the state-controlled national broadcaster.

Ilya Ponomaryov, a Duma deputy with A Just Russia and a member of the lower chamber's Science and Technology Committee, called the law a step forward but said it still might be poorly implemented “taking into account the problems with television in the country as a whole.”

Renowned child psychologist Alexander Shadura said another pending problem lies in the selection of experts to grade the media products.

The expert pool is shrinking because the area is “very poorly financed,” he told The Moscow Times.

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